

WHAT IS A FLOOD?

A flood is the temporary condition of a normally dry area becoming inundated by water. A flash flood is characterized by a rapid rise in water, high velocity and large amounts of debris. This type of flood is possibly the most dangerous because it occurs with very little warning.



WHAT CAUSES FLOODING?

Flooding is most frequently caused by heavy or persistent rainfall, but can also be caused by naturally melting snow and ice. Improper or blocked drainage systems, as well as, ruptured dams and levees or the release of an ice jam can cause flooding. Coastal flooding is caused by offshore storms or tsunamis (uncommon but possible in Massachusetts) which drive ocean water further inland than normal tides.

WHERE DOES FLOODING OCCUR?

Flooding most often occurs in a floodplain, which is the lowland adjacent to a river, stream, lake, or ocean. However, flooding can happen anywhere. Floodplains are designated by how often flooding occurs which is large enough to inundate them. To find out your community's flooding risk, contact your local emergency management office or local American Red Cross Chapter.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THERE'S A FLOOD?

Prevention/Planning

The only way to truly prevent damage from flooding is to not build on a floodplain. If structures already exist in the floodplain, they should be moved to higher ground. If prevention is not possible, there are several ways of minimizing flood damage.

- Have the structure elevated by professionals.
- Floodproof the structure.
- Surround the structure with a small wall or levee.
- Stockpile larger emergency materials such as plastic sheeting, plywood, sand bags, shovels.
- Have check valves installed in building sewer traps to prevent flood water from backing up sewer drains.
- Plan and practice evacuation routes.
- Assemble a [Disaster Supplies Kit](#).

- [Buy Flood Insurance!](#) Losses due to flooding may not be covered under your homeowners insurance.

A **flood/flash flood watch** is issued by the National Weather Service when flooding is likely in an area.

A **flood/flash flood warning** is issued when flooding is imminent, take necessary precautions immediately.

During a Watch

- Store extra water and food in case stores are closed or water is contaminated.
- Raise up or move contents of the house or office to a higher level.
- If the danger is great, move contents out entirely to a safe storage area.
- Give special attention to items in order of priority:
 - Items essential to living such as medical equipment/medicine.
 - Items that can not be replaced such as family heirlooms.
 - Important business/tax papers.
 - High value items such as fine art, furs and jewelry.
 - Carpets and appliances.
 - Furniture, drapes and bedding.
 - Food, miscellaneous.
- Remove or leave open all drawers, cabinet doors and room doors (they swell and stick shut).
- Turn off gas and electricity to prevent against fire and explosion.
- Turn off water to prevent loss of pressure.
- Remove furnace and gas burners to prevent clogging by sediment.
- Remove motors from equipment that can't be moved (furnaces, etc.).
- Disconnect gas lines to dryers and refrigerators, unplug other appliances to prevent breakage if the appliance floats.
- Remove wall receptacles to prevent siltation and facilitate faster restoration of power after floodwaters recede.
- Evacuate or raise supplies that will be needed in cleaning, such as mops, buckets, gloves, hoses, boots, etc.
- Fill the car with gas in case you have to evacuate.

During a Warning/Flood

- Listen to local radio and television stations for up to the minute weather/flood information and evacuations.
- If you are on high ground stay there, remain inside.
- If you must evacuate follow official instructions. Evacuate quickly to avoid being stranded or cut off by flood waters. Follow evacuation routes, short cuts may be blocked.
 - Bring important medicines, papers, etc.
 - Watch out for washouts, fallen wires, etc.
 - Drive slowly and exercise caution, especially at night. Driving quickly causes the car to have less contact with the road and is very dangerous!
 - Do Not Drive Through Water Above Your Ankles!
This is considered a low water crossing and is very dangerous. Six inches of water will float a small car and 2 feet of water will float any vehicle. Flood waters can be deceptive since they are often murky. They may be deeper than you think and can carry large debris that could harm you or disable your vehicle. The floodwater may also appear still, but there are often fast-moving currents just under the surface. If your car stalls and you must leave the vehicle, be cautious, the force of the water could knock you off your feet.



After the Flood

- Continue to listen to the radio and television for information and instructions.
- Be cautious of further flooding which may occur.
- Obtain a copy of Repairing your Flooded Home from the Red Cross, MEMA or your local emergency manager. It will tell you how to deal with reentering your home and recovering from the damage.
- Boil drinking water before using. If in doubt of your water quality, call your local public health authority.
- Throw away all food that comes in contact with flood water.
- Remember to help those who may need special assistance - elderly or disabled people and infants.
- Inspect for cracks in the foundation or other damage before entering a structure.
- Pump out flooded basements gradually (about 1/3 of the water per day) to avoid structural damage.
- Report broken down utility lines or other damages to authorities.
- Roads may be closed due to flood damage. Remember, barricades are put up for your safety, if you come upon a barricade or closed road, do not try to drive through.
- Try to stay off of the roads as much as possible to allow for emergency crews to clean up and repair the area.
- If you must go out, stay out of flood waters. The water may appear still but often has strong currents running through it. Flood water may also contain debris or sewerage, and may even be electrically charged.
- If entering flood water is unavoidable (i.e. flooded basements, etc.) poke debris with a stick or pole before going through it. Animals such as snakes and rats are very often found in flood water.
- Disasters may cause physical and emotional stress. Eat well and rest often. Keep a manageable schedule, don't try to do too much at once. The red cross and your local community will offer emotional support if necessary.
- If the damage is devastating, Disaster Assistance will be available. Contact local public safety officials, the Red Cross or listen to the media for information on how to obtain this assistance.

Each year, floods and flash floods claim more than 100 lives, drive 300,000 Americans from their homes and cause more than \$3.5 billion in property damage. Be prepared!